

The Goal for Groups: Transformation
Mark 4:33-41
Big Idea: Life Groups trigger transformation.

INTRODUCTION

Good morning! My name is Patrick Gibbs and I am one of the pastors here at MV. Pastor Bob will be back next Sunday. And that gives me the chance to again talk about something I think is very important. I think it's important to our church, but more importantly, I think it's vital to our own individual spiritual journeys- mine and yours.

Last week we looked at the Bible and discovered that the very first church accomplished some things in larger groups of people and some things in smaller groups of people. Look at Acts 2:46.



^{NLT} **Acts 2:46** They worshiped together at the Temple each day, met in homes for the Lord's Supper, and shared their meals with great joy and generosity—

▶ ^{NLT} **Acts 5:42** And every day, in the Temple and from house to house, they continued to teach and preach this message: "Jesus is the Messiah."

Getting together at the temple would be like what we are doing right here. It's the big group gathering to teach the Bible and worship and pray. But the early church also met in homes. You see, there are some things that are better done in smaller groups than in bigger groups. And it's as true for us as it was for them. Sure, our culture is different, so we do things differently. But small groups are none the less important. In fact, the small groups mentioned here in Acts seem to be just as important as the large group meeting. The things done in small groups or accomplished in small groups was and is just as important.

At MV, that same principle proves true. Our small groups are just as important as what we are doing today. And we call our small groups ▶ Life Groups. A Life Group is a group of 12-15 people who get together regularly for approximately 3 months. We all sign up at the same time, and all groups end at the same time. It's structured a little like college terms. We have a spring term, a summer term and a fall term. And we take several weeks off in between each. Some groups focus on the sermon from the previous Sunday, others offer a variety of topics with which one can apply Biblical principles. And January is one of those months when we get to join a Life Group.

I said last week that here at MV, we have ▶ 2 primary purposes for Life Groups. The first purpose is ▶ friendship. One of the reasons we encourage people to participate in Life Groups is the ability

to make some friends at MV because Sunday morning isn't small enough to facilitate starting friendships. Our big idea was "Life Groups foster friendships." So if you're coming to church looking to connect with some people and meet some people, Life Groups is the best place for that to occur.

So this morning, I'd like to talk about the second goal of Life Groups. The second goal for Life Groups is ► transformation. Transformation is simply "the operation of changing." Transformation is the process of becoming something different than you are right now. As MV tries to be a place where you can belong, believe and become, Life Groups are the path we have chosen to help more and more people **become** more and more like Jesus.

So, just like last week, I'm going to give you my big idea right up front. So if you pay attention right now, you will be able to go home today impressing people with how much you paid attention in church. So, here's the ► big idea: Life Groups trigger transformation.

At MV, the best way and the best place to change, to grow, to mature in your spiritual journey, to be transformed- whatever language you want to use- is in a Life Group. In fact, I rarely find any person who has been transformed solely by coming to church on Sunday. Sure, there are times here and there where someone comes up to me and says something like, "It seemed like you were talking right to me this morning." And we've all probably experienced that at different times. But for most of us, Sunday does not provide consistent, continual transformation. And so it's easy to get discouraged. We know we ought to go to church, but after awhile, if we don't sense some change, church becomes less important. Because most of us are here because we want to be something different.

So, for the next few minutes, I'd like us to consider how Life Groups trigger transformation. If you have a Bible, turn to Mark 4. In Mark 4, Jesus has been teaching to a large crowd of people. And we are going to pick up the story in Mark 4:33. ►

^{NLT} **Mark 4:33** Jesus used many similar stories and illustrations to teach the people as much as they could understand. ³⁴ In fact, in his public ministry he never taught without using parables; but afterward, when he was alone with his disciples, he explained everything to them. ► ³⁵ As evening came, Jesus said to his disciples, "Let's cross to the other side of the lake." ³⁶ So they took Jesus in the boat and started out, leaving the crowds behind (although other boats followed). ³⁷ But soon a fierce storm came up. High waves were breaking into the boat, and it began to fill with water. ► ³⁸ Jesus was sleeping at the back of the boat with his head on a cushion. The disciples woke him up, shouting, "Teacher, don't you care that we're

going to drown?" ³⁹ When Jesus woke up, he rebuked the wind and said to the water, "Silence! Be still!" Suddenly the wind stopped, and there was a great calm. ► ⁴⁰ Then he asked them, "Why are you afraid? Do you still have no faith?" ⁴¹ The disciples were absolutely terrified. "Who is this man?" they asked each other. "Even the wind and waves obey him!"

In many respects, this represents Jesus' small group. Jesus taught to huge crowds, and then he had some followers who followed him around. But then he had his disciples- the 12 guys he hand picked to invest in. The 12 guys he was going to leave his ministry to when he died. And I see 2 very important ideas in this historical account of Jesus with his small group or Life Group, if you will.

1. ► Life Groups are Interactive. Look at verse 34 again.

^{NLT} **Mark 4:34** In fact, in his public ministry he never taught without using parables; but afterward, when he was alone with his disciples, he explained everything to them.

Earlier in this account, in verse 10, Mark says, ►

^{NLT} **Mark 4:10** Later, when Jesus was alone with the twelve disciples and with the others who were gathered around, they asked him what the parables meant.

You see, for Jesus and his disciples, their version of Life Groups provided a time of interaction. The disciples could ask questions. Jesus could clarify what he was teaching and what he meant. And as read through the gospels, you find several times where Jesus interacted with his small group apart from the crowds. He taught them deeper truth. He spent time with them that he didn't spend with the masses.

And Life Groups do the same for us. Life Groups provide the interaction that large groups or weekend services do not. You don't get to ask questions in this format. If you need clarification, you have to wait until I am done. By then, most of us are checked out, looking at the clock and wishing this service was over because we just don't get it. Hey, I'm a pastor and I have felt that way too.

Sometime Life Groups answer the "How?" questions from Sunday morning. For example, I have been taught most of my life Ephesians 6:4. ►

^{NLT} **Ephesians 6:4** Fathers, do not provoke your children to anger by the way you treat them. Rather, bring them up with the discipline and instruction that comes from the Lord.

Great, I know that verse. I've heard tons of messages on that verse. And I walk away from most of them saying, "How?" I try. Sometimes I think I'm doing it well, other times I know I am not. For me, parenting is a constant struggle. But in a Life Group, I get to interact with Ephesians 6:4. I get to talk to other parents. I get to share what I don't understand. Sometimes I have people wiser than me that I can learn from. Sometimes I might be the wiser one and someone can learn from me. The point is, it's interactive.

► And let's face it, interaction requires time. Time we don't have on Sunday mornings. During the fall term of Life Groups, I spent 12 weeks in a parenting Life Group. In an environment where interaction makes the principles more real and more applicable. Where clarification helps me transform the way I think or act or respond. Life Groups trigger transformation, because they are interactive.

But there is a second way Life Groups trigger transformation. Look again at Mark beginning in verse 37. ►

^{NLT} **Mark 4:37** But soon a fierce storm came up. High waves were breaking into the boat, and it began to fill with water. ► ³⁸ Jesus was sleeping at the back of the boat with his head on a cushion. The disciples woke him up, shouting, "Teacher, don't you care that we're going to drown?" ³⁹ When Jesus woke up, he rebuked the wind and said to the water, "Silence! Be still!" Suddenly the wind stopped, and there was a great calm. ► ⁴⁰ Then he asked them, "Why are you afraid? Do you still have no faith?" ⁴¹ The disciples were absolutely terrified. "Who is this man?" they asked each other. "Even the wind and waves obey him!"

Here's what's interesting to me about this. The disciples had seen Jesus heal people. They had already seen Jesus perform miracles. So, why this time did they react the way they did. What is the significance of this miracle? I think it's because this miracle was personal. Jesus wasn't healing someone else; he wasn't casting out demons for someone else. This time the miracle was personal; he was saving them. When Jesus was together with his small group- His Life Group- if you will, his ► interaction was personal. He wasn't teaching the masses anymore; He was teaching *his* disciples based on where they were at. He met their needs and calmed their fears, but he also made the application of who he was personal for them. They weren't part of a big group anymore, they were learning and hearing what **they** needed to learn and hear. The lessons were for them

personally. And that's the second way Life Groups trigger transformation; they are personal. Or at least more personal than weekend services. It's difficult to make a Sunday talk like this personal for hundreds of people. Sure, I look for ways to make things applicable. I want everyone to leave with something that makes sense; something they can use in their life. Or some motivation to be different. But let's be real. I can't make things personal for every person on a regular basis. At MV, the personal part comes in Life Groups.

Some Life Groups focus on applying Sunday's message. It's a way to make Sunday's message more personal. And when it's more personal, there is a greater chance of transformation. If we can't make the Bible personal, it won't change us. Biblical knowledge does not transform us. I learned all kinds of things in Bible college that didn't change the way I live. Knowledge doesn't make you more like Jesus. Sitting in here on Sundays and hearing Bob explain what the Bible means- and very few people do it better than he does- doesn't make you more like Jesus. Thinking like Jesus that leads to acting like Jesus is what makes us like Jesus. Life Groups are important because they trigger transformation by making things more personal.

Other Life Groups have a topic or a need that the topic meets. For instance,

▶^{NLT} **Colossians 4:2** Devote yourselves to prayer with an alert mind and a thankful heart.

I've heard that verse dozens of times. I know the principle. But how do I make that personal. I do it in Life Groups by signing up for the ▶ "Prayer: Does it Make Any Difference?" LG.

▶^{NLT} **1 Corinthians 12:7** A spiritual gift is given to each of us so we can help each other.

I know the principle. But how do I make that personal. I do it by signing up for the ▶ "SHAPE" LG where I can learn how God has equipped me personally.

And I could go one, but I think you get the point. You have 18 opportunities to personalize Biblical truth. Life Groups trigger transformation because they are more personal than Sundays. And they let you choose to focus on where God might be looking for a transformation.

▶ As I was putting this talk together, I thought about how different I am today than I was say 10 years ago. After several marriage retreats- which I would strongly recommend- and a few Life Groups that focus on marriage, I live with Jen in a much more understanding way. I haven't arrived, but I am transformed, and so is Jen.

I haven't mastered the parenting thing, but I'm getting better with each kid.

Through Life Groups- through interaction with the Bible and Biblical principles and other people and God- and through personal application- God has transformed me from a cold cynic to a more compassionate person. Through Life Groups I have learned to be a more patient person with others. And these are just my stories, but I could also tell you stories of people I know. Stories of transformation from timid to courageous; from anxious to more peaceful; from fear to confidence; from being in debt to being debt free; from being angry to being forgiving. And I could go on. Life Groups trigger transformation because they are interactive and more personal.

And so I am going to ask you the same thing I asked last week. ► Will you sign up and go? Somewhere on a chair around you, you should have seen a Life Group catalog. This catalog lists the group topics, times, places, leaders and a description of the group. You can sign up by writing a group number on your connection card and placing it in the offering box in the back. Or you can go online at moonvalleybible.org. Or you can visit the table in the lobby where some leaders can answer your questions.

But will you sign up and go? You know, over the years, we have used different surveys to gauge the effectiveness of Life Groups. And they all say the same thing: people in Life Groups experience more transformation than those who aren't. And it isn't about commitment. And it isn't because people who don't go to Life Groups don't care or are less committed or don't want to become more like Jesus. It's because Life Groups trigger transformation better than weekend church. So sign up and go?

PRAY